Joyful HOPE

Lionel Hartley

Joyful HOPE

Lionel Hartley

Joyful Hope
Lionel Hartley
Copyright ©2005 Lionel Hartley
Edited by volunteers and adapted from audio recordings
of a few of Lionel Hartley's public presentations.
All rights reserved in all countries.
No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any
manner whatsoever without written permission except
in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical
articles and reviews.
Typeset in Times
Illustrated with original drawings by Lionel Hartley
Typesetting by volunteers using a book template provided
and designed by the author.

Contents

Introduction 5

Chapter 1: *Spes Unica* 7

Chapter 2: Hope's Seven R's 17

Chapter 3: Whispering Hope 39

Chapter 4: Hope in God 61

Chapter 5: Christmas Hope 83

Chapter 6: The Blessed Hope 107

Chapter 7: Hope and Heaven 121

Introduction

Reader's Digest* shares the words of television puppeteer Shari Lewis, "As long as I actively attack a problem, I am confident that the situation can be improved"

"About a decade ago I was told I had breast cancer and would need radical surgery. Hopeful there was another path, I sought other opinions, keeping hope alive long enough to find another surgeon and other treatments that enabled me to avoid radical procedures. And I've been totally healthy for lo these many years."

She goes on to say, "I find that it works both ways. If you are hopeful, of course you can take action. The miracle occurs when you don't feel much hope, yet you push yourself into action anyway. Perhaps it is the brain, stimulated by the action, that brings you back to hope. I don't know why it works. I just know that it does."

This book invites you, the reader, to share in a

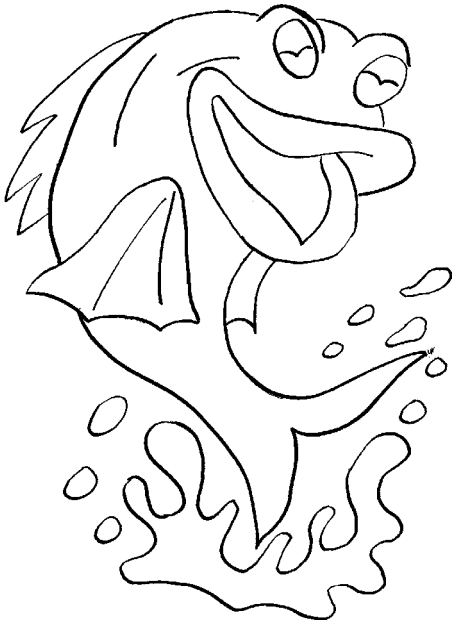
joyful hope with and in Christ.

Life with Christ is an endless hope, Life without Christ has a hopeless end.

Each chapter concludes with a prayer.

I express my thanks to the volunteers who edited and adapted these messages from audio recordings of a selection of my public presentations.

— Lionel Hartley, 2005



(* Reader's Digest, November, 1995, p.7)

Chapter 1: *Spes Unica*

A cartoon once showed two Eskimos fishing through holes in the ice.

One of the Eskimos had made a hole such as you might expect to see, about the size of a manhole cover.

The other had dropped his line in an immense hole that seemed to reach to the edge of the horizon, in the shape of a whale!

1 Peter 1:3 reads, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead”.

Rumours spread through a small town in Maine, USA, about its coming demise. The state government had decided to flood the area where the town stood, create a large lake, build a dam, and add to the state’s water and power supplies. With this prospect ahead of them, residents in the town stopped

making improvements to their houses. Paint began to peel. Grass grew high in front yards.

One man in the town explained the town's bedraggled appearance. He said, "Where there is no faith in the future, there is no power in the present."

There is a word for having faith in the future. It is the word "hope." And now is the time for us to put our hope into practice.

Romans 15:13, "Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost."

Several years ago the noted British journalist Malcolm Muggeridge was a guest at a breakfast in Washington, D.C. When he had finished his testimony, he made a number of comments about world affairs, all of which were very pessimistic.

One of the Christians present said to the speaker, "Dr. Muggeridge, you have been very pessimistic. Don't you have any reason for optimism?"

Muggeridge replied, "My friend, I could not

be more optimistic than I am, because my hope is in Jesus Christ alone." He allowed that remark to settle for a few seconds, and then he added, "Just think if the apostolic church had pinned its hope on the Roman Empire!"

Talking of Jesus Christ, Edward Mote wrote the hymn 'My Hope is Built on Nothing Less'. Contemplate these lyrics, *"When darkness veils His lovely face, I rest on His unchanging grace. In every high and stormy gale, my anchor holds within the veil. His oath, His covenant, His blood supports me in the whelming flood. When all around my soul gives way, He then is all my hope and stay".*

In the Bible in the book of Jeremiah Chapter 32 we read that Jeremiah put his hope into practice. About 588 BC, Jeremiah lived in Jerusalem. His city was under attack by the Babylonians. The citizens felt panic.

In a year, the Babylonian army would capture Jerusalem and start moving its people to prisoner of war camps.

A relative of Jeremiah asked him to buy a piece of land from him. Though the land was already in

enemy hands, Jeremiah put his hope into practice. He bought the field. He put the deed in a pottery jar. In the face of his people's hopelessness, Jeremiah defiantly invested in Israel's future.

Jesus of Nazareth put his hope into practice. Mark's gospel account, in Mark 3:14, says, "And he ordained (or chose) twelve [men], that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach". Jesus invested himself in his relationship with his motley bunch of disciples.

Marcus Borg wrote, "The Jesus movement saw itself as a way for Israel, as a historical alternative in the crisis facing the Jewish social world"

After watching some children at the beach whose sand castle had been knocked down by the water, Rabbi Harold Kushner wrote: "All the things in our lives, all the complicated structures we spend so much time and energy creating, are built on sand. Only our relationships [to our God and] to other people, endure."

In a British church is an inscription. It celebrates a man named Robert Baronet. There was no monarch during the Commonwealth and Oliver

Cromwell ruled.

The inscription reads: “In the year 1653 when all things sacred were throughout the nation either demolished or profaned, Sir Robert Shirley Baronet founded this church whose singular praise it is to have down the best things in the worst times and hoped [in] them in the most calamitous.”

Certainly putting our hope into practice is choosing to do only the best things.

I titled this chapter ‘*Spes Unica*’ This is taken from a Latin pious expression or motto, ‘*Ave Crux Spes Unica*’ meaning “Hail to the Cross, our only hope.”

Kevin Eikenberry wrote, “This is how hope works: it looks for the good in people and situations, rather than finding the worst; it discovers what can be done instead of throwing up its hands at what can’t; it considers problems large and small, as opportunities to move forward when it would be easier to quit; it makes us human, helping us find the very best in ourselves for those around us and the situations we face.”

Vaclav Havel wrote, “I am not an optimist, because I am not sure that everything ends well. Nor am I a pessimist, because I am not sure everything ends badly. I just carry hope in my heart . . . Life without hope is an empty, boring and useless life. I cannot imagine that I could strive for something if I did not carry hope in me. I am thankful to God for this gift. It is as big a gift as life itself”.

I few years ago, I recall hearing for the first time a song entitled, ‘Never give up’. I don’t know much about it apart from the fact that it was written by Chuck Fulmore in the 1970s and first sung by a his own singing group.

However it is worth pausing to contemplate the words: *“There are days, I know, when you get so discouraged, it seems that all hope is gone. But there’s only One who can give you courage and strength to carry on. This old world I know can’t last much longer, and sin will soon pass away. But my faith in God simply keeps growing stronger, for Jesus is coming some day!*

Never give up, Jesus is coming. It’s the darkest just before dawn. Never give up, Jesus is coming. Never give up, keep holding on”.

Just a little bit of trivia: dogs cannot see the colour red. They have only two cones within the eye that allow them to see colour. We, on the other hand, have three cones in our eyes. This means that we can see not only red, we see as many as 98 more individual colours than dogs.

Reflection on this, the Reverend Rick Matters wrote, “God’s hope is like this: Without Jesus, we see life through the eyes of a dog: we’re born, we have a little fun, we work hard, we retire, then we die. With Jesus life has much more meaning, love, and joy. When we die, there is more, much more! God’s audacious hope goes beyond what we now profess: God’s hope might be compared to butterflies, for butterflies have five cones for seeing colours! Think of all the colours we cannot yet see, which God has in store for us”.

Does that give us something to hope for?

I would like to close this chapter with an anonymous poem entitled, “Look Up!

“I look not back — God knows the
fruitless efforts, the wasted hours, the
sinning and regrets; I leave them all with

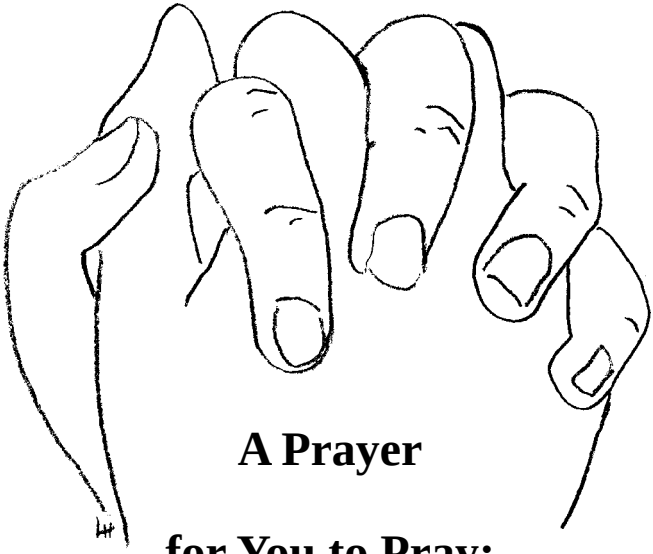
Him who blots the record, and graciously forgives, and then forgets.

I look not forward — God sees all the future, the road that, short or long, will lead me home; and He will face with me its every trial, and bear for me the burden that may come.

I look not around me — then would tears assail me, so wild the tumult of life's restless seas; so dark the world, so filled with war and evil, so vain the hope of comfort and of ease.

I look not inward — that would make me wretched, for I have naught on which to stay my trust; nothing I see but failures and shortcomings, and weak endeavours crumbling into dust.

But I look up — up into the face of Jesus! For there my heart can rest, my fears are stilled; and there is joy and love, and light for darkness, and perfect peace, and every hope fulfilled."



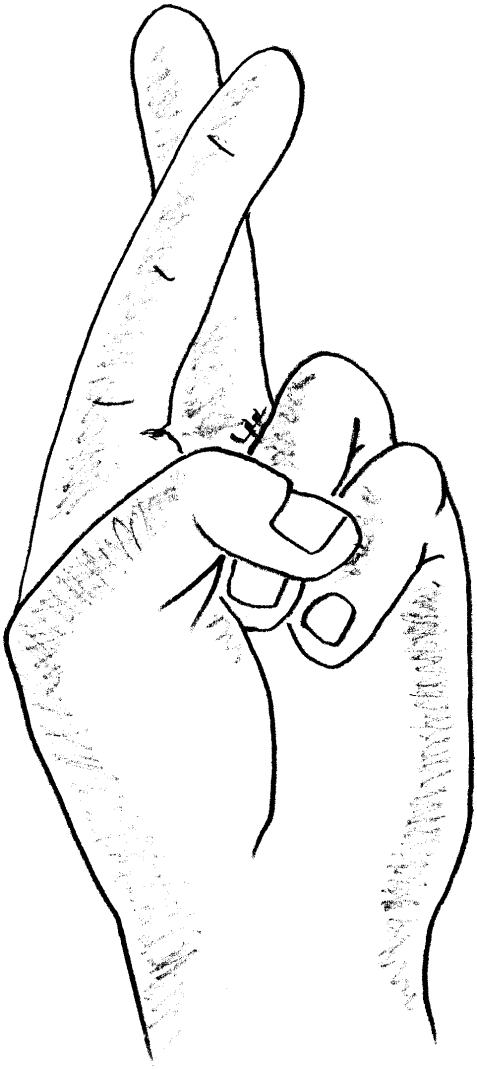
A Prayer

for You to Pray:

Lord, may the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace in believing, that we may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost*.

And may we each receive from Your hand the blessing promised from God the Father, Jesus the Son and from the Holy Spirit. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

(*Romans 15:13)



Chapter 2: Hope's Seven R's

I just love to start a chapter with scripture and this chapter is no exception.

Psalm 62:5-8 "My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him. He only is my rock and my salvation: he is my defence; I shall not be moved. In God is my salvation and my glory: the rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God. Trust in him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before him: God is a refuge for us."

People are looking for hope everywhere. There are no hopeless situations, only people who think hopelessly and this whole world is in desperate need of the hope that only Jesus can bring.

That's why His word declares in 1 Peter 1:3 "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you"

God has there a special place for a special people. He's got it right there for you and me. That's so important. So, today, and every day, this side of heaven we have every reason to look up, do we not?

In the suburb of Bray Park, in Murwillumbah NSW, Australia is a small street called Hope Street. This quiet treed cul-de-sac has a sign, erected by Council, at the entrance. On this signpost below the words, 'Hope Street", appear the very sad words, "No Through Road."

When I was very young, I remember seeing a sign on a similar cul-de-sac in another country with the words "No Exit" on a sign at the entrance. I recall asking my mother what an exit was. For simplicity, she explained that it was the way out of somewhere. In my child's mind I pictured a street that, if a visitor dared to enter it, he or she would never return and I guess that I figured that only the actual residents could come and go (as I had seen them do).

I remembered that troublesome childhood experience when I first read, "Hope Street - No Through Road." Surely hope is not the end of the road, an abyss with no return, or somewhere that only the current residents may dare to venture.

Hope is not a ‘No Through Road’ - You and I can use hope as a valuable part of our journey whatever road we take. Hope is not the end. Hope is just the beginning.

Notice that Peter calls this a lively hope. Some translations call it a living hope. The Greek word ‘d’zao’ tells us that it is a hope that will not die. The American Indians called corn, ‘maize’, which means ‘our life.’ It was indeed a staple of their diet, and life depended on it. Peter also reminds us that hope is essential to life.

The Bible says that this hope not going to perish. In other words, it’s not going to just be for a while and then pass away. Nothing is going to ruin it or change it. It’s never going to fade, it’s never going to wear out. And that’s pretty good news, because we wear out, don’t we.

Everything that we touch eventually will wear out. Our homes wear out. Our bodies wear out. Our cars wear out. They rust out. They don’t last. Everything here on planet Earth sooner or later wears out, rots out, burns out, rusts out, gets eaten out or gives out.

So, this side of heaven, this lively, living hope is something that never wears out, is never is going to pass away, and is always going to remain new.

Hymn books everywhere abound in verses that speak of this lively hope.

J S B Monsell in the mid 1800s wrote the hymn "O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness". Listen to these words of comfort and hope from the fourth verse: "Mornings of joy give for evenings of tearfulness, Trust for our trembling, and hope for our fear".

In 1719, Isaac Watts wrote "The men that love and fear Thy name / Shall see their hopes fulfilled; \ The mighty God will compass them \ With favour as a shield". That same year he wrote, "O God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come".

In 1923, Thomas Obediah Chisholm wrote, "Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth, thy own dear presence to cheer and to guide; strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow, blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside. Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord unto me".

In 1799 John Newton wrote, “The Lord has promised good to me, his word my hope secures; he will my shield and portion be, as long as life endures”.

Often at Christmastide we will sing the 1868 Bethlehem Carol of Phillips Brooks, “The hopes and fears of all the years are met in Thee tonight”.

1n 1933, Alfred H Ackley wrote regarding the risen Saviour, “The hope of all who seek Him, the help of all who find, none other is so loving, so good and kind”.

Samuel O’Malley Cluff wrote, “I have a Father; to me He has given a hope for eternity, blessed and true; and soon He will call to meet Him in heaven, but oh that He’d let me bring you with me, too”.

In the 1950s, as a boy soprano, I was invited to sing a solo piece with the Christchurch Symphony Orchestra for a civic event. For the feature piece of the event, they were playing Jean Sebellius’ rousing tone poem Finlandia.

At almost the close of the anthem, prior to the final fanfare, the orchestra suddenly goes quiet and my voice filled the concert hall as I sang “Be still,

my soul, the Lord is on Thy side.' And in the second verse I sang these words: "Be still, my soul: thy God doth undertake to guide the future as He has the past. Thy hope, thy confidence, let nothing shake; all now mysterious shall be bright at last".

In the words of Sabine Baring-Gould, the Christian Soldiers marching onward sing, "We are not divided, all one body we; one in hope and doctrine, one in charity".

This lively hope is based on what I call hope's seven R's: redemption, resurrection, revelation, rejoicing, receiving, requirements and returning.

Redemption

That first R describes our redemption by Jesus through the shedding of His own blood.

1 Peter 1:18,19, "Foreasmuch as ye know that ye not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot."

For a number of years, I ministered in pulpits in the rural towns of Glen Innes and Tenterfield in New South Wales, and many in those congregations are sheep farmers or shepherds. They will be quick to tell you that the price of lambs varies from season to season and they regularly listen to the farm reports on the radio to learn the current price of lambs. However, the Lamb of God remains priceless, his value, his worth, never changes.

Under the Old Testament sacrificial system, every worshiper had to bring his own lamb. If he had no lamb, he could not borrow a lamb; God forbid that he should steal a lamb. No one could even give him a lamb. He had to provide his own lamb even if it meant that he had to buy a lamb especially. In the New Testament this is reversed. God provides the Lamb.

During the 12th Century Crusades, King Richard the Lionhearted angered the Babenberger King Leopold the Fifth (the Duke of Austria), when King Richard took down Leopold's banner and put up his own. So as he returned from the Crusades, Richard was kidnapped by Leopold and held for ransom.

Leopold demanded a ransom of 150,000 silver marks. This was an enormous sum. Eventually, Richard was set free but the ransom was never entirely paid. Only a part of it was paid to Leopold, who then turned Richard over to Emperor Henry VI who demanded a second ransom. Richard had to be ransomed twice.

But 1 Peter 1:18 says that we were not redeemed with corruptible things like silver and gold. Our redemption had to be done only once. "Jesus paid it all."

We read in 1 Peter 1:18, "Foreasmuch as ye know that ye not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot."

1 John 1:7, "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin".

Dr. Paul Brand in his book, 'God's Forever Feast' wrote, "I used to think it strange that the Bible

keeps talking about the cleansing power of the blood. It seemed to me that blood was messy stuff. I needed to wash my white lab coats if they became stained with blood."

Today, Brand says, he loves the analogy, saying that it is so true of the body. The blood is constantly cleansing every cell, and washing away all the debris that accumulates all the time.

Hebrews 9:14 says, "How much more shall the blood of Christ purge your conscience from dead works?"

Resurrection

I'm grateful that there was not just a cross, there was not just a death, because that brings us to that second R. If it had not been for a resurrection there would be not reason for you and me to even be here today.

In an article entitled, 'Your Father Loves You', J I Packer wrote, "You could speak of Jesus' rising as the most hope-full thing that has ever happened—and you would be right!" He spelt hopeful as two words hyphenated: 'hope-full'.

Alfred Lord Tennyson expressed his belief in the resurrection in his poem, ‘Crossing the Bar’. He gave instructions that it was to appear in every book of his poems that should ever be published, and always at the end of the book. He wanted all who read his works to see this assertion of faith in the face of death.

For those unfamiliar with ‘Crossing the Bar’, here is how it goes:

“Sunset and evening star, and one clear call for me! And may there be no moaning of the bar, when I put out to sea. But such a tide as moving seems asleep, too full for sound and foam, when that which drew from out the boundless deep turns again home. Twilight and evening bell, and after that the dark!

And may there be no sadness of farewell, when I embark; for tho’ from out our bourne of time and place the flood may bear me far, I hope to see my Pilot face to face when I have crost the bar.”

Without the resurrection your faith and my faith would be in vain.

Over in Hanover, Germany there’s a place that

they call, “The Open Grave.” There was a certain man there who was an agnostic, which is a person who thinks it is impossible to know whether there is a God or a future life, or anything beyond the grave. He did not believe in God or maybe he didn’t believe that there was anything that was going to take place after death.

To really underscore his thinking, he said, “When I die, I want boulders put on my grave, and then I want steel bands to secure those boulders. Then on top of those boulders I want a huge chunk of marble over those bands and stones.”

When he died, and his body was placed in the grave, they did just exactly what he asked them to do. But, what he did not anticipate was that when the workmen were putting the boulders on his grave, at that very moment there was a little birch seed that also fell down in between those big boulders.

When everything was done and the iron was secured in place clasping the boulders, the chunk of marble was heaved on top with a plaque inscribed, “This grave was purchased for eternity and must never be opened”.

But if you go there today, it is called, “The Open Grave” for all to see. Why? Because over the years, a little seedling and root structure came down and one day those steel bands burst wide open and up through that grave came a mighty birch tree.

If death is only death, if there is no resurrection, then it’s all in vain. But because Jesus Christ came forth from the grave we can have the ‘lively hope’ that you and I will come forth also.

Revelation

Our next ‘R’ is Revelation. Look with me at 1 Peter 1:13.

1 Peter 1:13 says, “Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ”.

The chapel at Robina Hospital is used by many religious organizations at various times.

When I was recently there as a guest preacher I saw on the display table in the entranceway a supply of the book ‘The Bhagavad Gita’ that had obviously

been left there as an evangelistic effort by someone from another faith community.

The Bhagavad Gita' is very much loved by India's religious community. In the form of a dialogue between the warrior Arjuna and the god Krishna, disguised as a charioteer, it sets forth many different points of view as to religion.

How utterly different is the Christ of the Bible. He did not come in disguise, he declared himself to be the way and the truth and the life, and he set forth a singular view in normal conversations with normal people who had normal needs. Jesus, as God, was truly a revelation of God.

This revelation of Jesus is so important. Life is filled with questions. Life is filled with problems. Sometimes people say simplistically, "Christ is the answer."

But Christ is not the answer to all our questions. Sometimes he is the strength that helps us to live with unanswered questions.

He is not the solution to all our problems. Sometimes he is the power that enables us to live with

unsolvable problems.

Rejoicing

And, that really brings us to the next ‘R’ that’s talked about in First Peter, ‘Rejoicing’.

I have had some volunteers and adapted from selected audio recordings of a few of my public presentations and the concept of rejoicing hope was the reason the volunteer editors chose “Joyful Hope” as the title of this book.

1 Peter 1:6, “Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations:

And verse 8, “Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory”.

There’s going to be times of trial this side of heaven. There’s going to be suffering, but

Peter says we can rejoice, and even rejoice when we suffer. Why? Because Jesus suffered horribly for us so we’ll never have to suffer like that. He suffered with the entire sins of the world upon Him.

Indeed He truly suffered.

Alexander MacLaren wrote, “If our hope is to grow out of our sorrow, it must be because our sorrow drives us to God”.

Receiving

1 Peter 1:9 says, “Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls. That’s our next ‘R”: Receiving. The New Living Translation says, “Your reward for trusting him will be the salvation of your souls”.

Vance Havner wrote, “Simply wait on [God]. So doing, we shall be directed, supplied, protected, corrected, and rewarded”.

Requirement

The sixth R is Requirement. 1 Peter 1:13

1 Peter 1:13-16, “Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your

ignorance: but as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, ‘Be ye holy; for I am holy’.”

It says, “Gird up the loins of your mind.” The only way I know to do that is to stay focused upon Him. The best way to do that is in the Word, the Bible, where you truly get to know Him.

So, how is the requirement going to take place? Obedience can only take place when we have a relationship with Jesus that allows His life to be lived out in us.

Returning

And now we come to hope’s number 7 ‘R’, ‘Returning’. This number 7 is found in verse 7.

Think back to 1 Peter 1:7, “That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ”.

A short time after President Kennedy was inaugurated he had a conference with Billy Graham.

They spoke about the world conditions. Billy told him that the only hope for the world was the second coming of Christ. The president was amazed; he had never heard of such a thing.

Billy explained the Bible teaching about a hope in the second coming and Mr. Kennedy said, “Does my church teach that?” “I don’t know,” replied Billy Graham, “but it is in the Bible.”

The president seemed deeply interested and said, “Sometime I want you to come to Washington and tell my cabinet what you have told me.”

Spurgeon used to warn his congregation never to forget the three ‘whats’ of 1 Peter 1:

What from? Believers are redeemed from destruction.
What by? By the precious blood of Christ.
What to? To an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that will not fade away.

The late Wayne Hooper used to sing as a soloist on The Quiet Hour radio program and as a baritone in the singing group, The King’s Heralds. In 1962 he composed a hymn that has been used in all of the Seventh-day Adventist General Conference Sessions

since then.

There is only one verse and it says, *"We have this hope that burns within our hearts, Hope in the coming of the Lord. We have this faith that Christ alone imparts, Faith in the promise of His word. We believe the time is here, When the nations far and near, Shall awake, and shout and sing - Hallelujah! Christ is King! We have this hope that burns within our hearts, Hope in the coming of the Lord".*

1 Peter 1:7 reminds us that we do not need to be frustrated waiting for the Lord to come.

A while ago I sought a valuation on a house we had for sale in the Brother Mountains east of Glen Innes in New South Wales.

Fortunately I journalled the ensuing events and I so am able to relate them to you.

Unfortunately, when I went to the house (a six to eight hour drive from where we lived in the Tweed Shire) and waited for the agent to arrive at the designated time, he failed to show up.

A telephone call to his office the next day confirmed an alternative time and I waited at the house

another day for him. He failed to show up again.

I returned to the Tweed and telephoned again, but his secretary insisted that I come in personally to discuss it with him.

Having just driven all night, I chose to telephone a different Real Estate and requested an appraisal (as they were not in a position to provide a full valuation). A time was confirmed and I returned to the house and waited. He also failed to show up.

When I contacted him by telephone from the village in the mountains and bemoaned the fact that I had made a special trip, he shrugged it off by claiming that he was no longer interested in domestic properties as he had more than enough rural properties to keep him busy.

I returned to the Tweed again and contacted yet another Real Estate Agent (part of a large franchise chain). The agent was not available when I called (twice) and did not return my calls. I located his website on the Internet and requested an appraisal by email. To this also he failed to reply.

I asked the local Real Estate under the same

franchise in our town to organise an appraisal by this third illusive Real Estate, and they telephoned him and asked him to contact me, which he did not.

I then sent an email via the Internet to the Real Estate Franchise Head Office and to express my concerns. They sent me a reply saying my email would be forwarded to the said Real Estate Agent. I still have not heard back from either of them.

I finally contacted a tiny one-man Real Estate Agency and was given a date for an appraisal.

I again went to the house and waited for the agent to arrive at the designated time. (I even telephoned him again in the morning to make sure he had not forgotten).

He was to arrive at 4:00pm. At 6:00pm I telephoned him again and he apologised, saying he had been delayed at a rural property some considerable distance away.

He assured me that he would be there “first thing in the morning, before he opened his office”.

By 11:00am he still had not arrived and I once again telephoned. He apologised, saying he had

forgotten, but would be there later in the day.

He came at around 1:30pm, only four months after my first frustrating attempt at moving Real estate Agents.

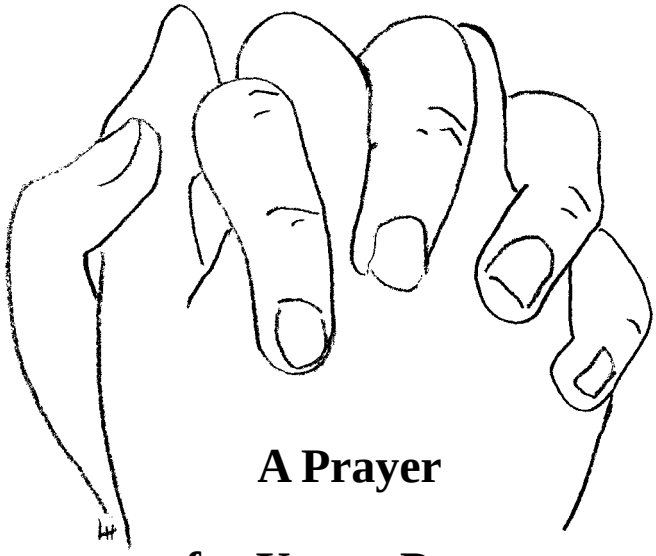
Although I waited impatiently for the Agent's coming and was disappointed repeatedly, I know that when Jesus says that He is coming, I don't have to spend $100 on petrol and drive up to the mountains to meet Him.

I don't have to wait impatiently with my watch in my hand, wondering if He will show up or not.

In fact, He has promised to return (and I believe Him), and He has been courteous enough not to frustrate me with a schedule. He simply said 'soon', and 'occupy until I come'.

This sure takes the pressure off my waiting. And even though I want His 'soon' to be sooner, if we are ready, we won't be frustrated or disappointed.

"We have this [joyful and lively] hope that burns within our hearts, hope in the coming of the Lord."



A Prayer

for You to Pray:

Thank You Lord for a lively hope that is based on the fact that you have redeemed us. A hope that hinges on Your resurrection and revelation. A lively hope filled with rejoicing and receiving. A hope that is not diminished by requirements but spurs us on to further hope as we await Your returning. For this we thank You Lord. In Jesus. Name, Amen.

Chapter 3: Whispering Hope

1 Peter 1:3, 4, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fades not away, reserved in heaven for you”.

What is hope?

A man in his middle years was on a Caribbean cruise.

On the first day out he noticed an attractive woman about his age who smiled at him in a friendly way as he passed her on the deck, which pleased him.

That night he managed to get seated at the same table with her for dinner.

As the conversation developed, he commented that he had seen her on the deck that day and he had appreciated her friendly smile.

When she heard this she smiled and commented, “Well, I’m a widow and the reason I smiled was that when I saw you I was immediately struck by your strong resemblance to my second husband.”

At this he perked up his ears and said, “Oh, and how many times have you been married?”

She looked down at her plate, smiled modestly, and answered, “Once.”

Hope is sometimes unspoken.

At a certain university there was a piano teacher that was simply and affectionately known as “Herman.” One night in 1978 at a university concert, a distinguished piano player suddenly became ill while performing an extremely difficult piece.

No sooner had the artist retired from the stage when Herman rose from his seat in the audience, walked onstage, sat down at the piano and with great mastery completed the performance.

Later that evening, at a party, one of the students asked Herman how he was able to perform such a demanding piece so beautifully without notice

and with no rehearsal. He replied, “In 1939, when I was a budding young concert pianist, I was arrested and placed in a Nazi concentration camp. Putting it mildly, the future looked bleak.”

“But I knew that in order to keep the flicker of hope alive that I might someday play again, I needed to practice every day. I began by fingering a piece from my repertoire on my bare board bed late one night. The next night I added a second piece and soon I was running through my entire repertoire. I did this every night for five years.”

“It so happens that the piece I played tonight at the concert hall was part of that repertoire. That constant practice is what kept my hope alive.”

“Everyday I renewed my hope that I would one day be able to play my music again on a real piano, and in freedom”.

Hope is sometimes whispered.

Fifteen-year-old Douglas Maurer had been feeling bad for several days. His mother took him to the hospital in St. Louis where he was diagnosed as having leukaemia.

The doctors told him in frank terms about his disease. They said that for the next three years, he would have to undergo chemotherapy. They didn't sugar-coat the side effects.

They told Douglas, that although he would recover, he may go bald and that his body would most likely bloat. Upon learning this, he went into a deep depression.

His aunt called a florist shop to send Douglas an arrangement of flowers. She told the clerk that it was for her teenage nephew who had leukaemia. When the flowers arrived at the hospital, they were beautiful.

Douglas read the card from his aunt without emotion. Then he noticed a second card. It said: *"Douglas - I took your order. I work at Brix Florist. I had leukaemia when I was seven years old. I'm 22 years old now. Good Luck. My heart goes out to you. Sincerely, Laura Bradley."*

His face lit up. "Oh wow!" he said.

It's interesting: Douglas Maurer was in a Missouri hospital filled with millions of dollars of

the most sophisticated technological equipment. He was being treated by expert doctors and nurses with competent medical training.

But it was a sales clerk in a flower shop, a young woman who, by taking the time to care and by being willing to go with what her heart told her to do - gave Douglas hope and the will to carry on.

If we have it ourselves, hope is a gift that we can give to others.

Joyce Hollyday tells the story of a schoolteacher who was assigned to visit children in a large city hospital. One day this teacher received a routine call requesting that she visit a particular child.

The teacher took the boy's name and room number, and was told by the teacher on the other end of the line, "We're studying nouns and adverbs in this class now. I'd be grateful if you could help him with his homework, so he doesn't fall behind the others.

It wasn't until the visiting teacher got outside the boy's room that she realized that it was located in the hospital's burn unit. No one had prepared her to

find a young boy horribly burned and in great pain.

The teacher felt that she couldn't just turn around and walk out. And so she stammered awkwardly, "I'm the hospital teacher, and your teacher sent me to help you with nouns and adverbs."

This boy was in so much pain that he barely responded. The young teacher stumbled through his English lesson, ashamed at putting him through such a senseless exercise.

The next morning a nurse on the burns unit asked her, "What did you do to that boy?"

Before the teacher could finish her outburst of apologies, the nurse interrupted her: "You don't understand. We've been very worried about him. But ever since you were here yesterday, his whole attitude has changed. He's fighting back; he's responding to treatment. It's as if he has decided to live."

The boy later explained that he had completely given up hope until he saw the teacher. It all changed when he came to a simple realization.

With joyful tears, the boy said: "They wouldn't send a teacher to work on nouns and adverbs with a

boy who was dying, would they?"

This story invites us to celebrate the gift of life even when all we seem to see around us is pain and disappointment and brokenness. It shows us that on the other side of pain, there is resurrection. It reminds us of what is possible whenever there is hope

Maybe you can whisper hope to someone today.

In 1868, Septimus Winner using the pseudonym Alice Hawthorne wrote, *"Soft as the voice of an angel, breathing a lesson unheard, hope with a gentle persuasion whispers her comforting word: wait till the darkness is over, wait till the tempest is done, hope for the sunshine tomorrow, after the shower is gone."*

"Whispering hope, Oh how welcome thy voice, making my heart in its sorrow rejoice."

False Hope

I'm sure you're fully aware that there is such a thing as false or dashed hope.

In the early 1980s I was approached after

church by an elderly church member who asked if I knew her granddaughter who was now overseas but had been working as a nurse in the same hospital as me.

Yes, I did know her, quite well, in fact, as we had worked together quite a number of times over an extended period of time.

The member explained that the granddaughter was working overseas at a mission hospital but had caused quite a deal of disruption by insisting that things be done her war.

This member knew that although I had left nursing, at that time I was managing a public counselling practice at the same hospital. And so she asked if I could write to the granddaughter as a concerned friend and encourage her to change her approach.

I agreed and said that I would send an immediate telegram with an appropriate Bible reference and follow it with a lengthy letter of explanation.

So I duly sent the telegram which read: AMOS

3:1-3 LETTER FOLLOWING.

And I did follow it with a letter of explanation.

Amos 3:1-3 says, “Hear this word that the Lord hath spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt, saying, You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities. Can two walk together, except they be agreed?”

Unfortunately the telegraph operator left off the first three letters of the name of the Bible book Amos. So the telegram that she received read,

S 3:1-3 LETTER FOLLOWING. LIONEL

Now this young lady was an intelligent person and figured out that it was a Bible reference in the message and to expect a letter from Lionel in the mail. But what book of the Bible starts with S?

It couldn’t be Psalms as that starts with a letter P.
It couldn’t be Samuel as that starts with a 1 or 2.
It could only be the Solomon’s Song of Songs.

Embarrassingly, Song of Songs 3:1-3 reads,

“By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not. I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways I will seek him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not. The watchmen that go about the city found me: to whom I said, Saw ye him whom my soul loveth?”

And this was a message from Lionel and it said that a letter was following.

Well, she was sufficiently moved by this, and so she wrote me a very passionate love letter responding to her perception of what I had said. Our letters crossed in the mail and it was over a week later that I received another letter in which she profusely apologised for the misunderstanding.

Now you want me to tell you that we got married and lived happily ever after — well, no, we simply continued to love each other as sister and brother Christ. And so apologies were accepted and to her credit she took my counsel and ceased her inappropriate behaviour.

So there is such a thing as dashed hope.

This was highlighted in an address by Lewis Smedes.

He said, ‘For the first decade of our marriage, my wife, Doris, and I hoped passionately for a child. I think we wanted a child more than we wanted anything else in the world. So we hoped and prayed for ten long years. And then finally, after ten years, Doris became pregnant. We thanked God and drank a toast to hope.

One night, about six months into the pregnancy, something went wrong, and I called the doctor. He told me Doris was going into labour and to get her into the car and take her to the emergency room right away.

“I’ll meet you there,” he said. “Oh, yes; I have one more thing to tell you; I should have told you before. Your baby is going to be seriously malformed.”

“Malformed? Seriously? How serious?”

“Very serious. It’s up to you now to tell Doris on the way to the hospital.”

Well, I told her. But we decided that we were

not going to give up hope. No matter what the doctor said, we were not going to give up hope. So we kept on hoping all through the night.

At six o'clock in the morning, the doctor came to me with a somewhat embarrassed grin from ear to ear. He said, "Congratulations! You have a perfect baby boy. Come and see." I went with him, and there he was, yelling his head off, looking just like me—a perfect man-child. Praise God! We thought.

It's true. Never give up hope. Never, ever give up hope.

What has this got to do with dashed hope?

Lewis Smedes tells us that two days later their baby was dead.

Maybe you need someone to whisper hope to you today.

A common greeting of these days is, "How are you?" The stereotypical reply is, "Fine, and how are you?"

No one comments on the obvious and colossal lie that it is. I confess that I frequently give this reply

to my friends who would be dismayed and bored if I tried to tell them the lengthy truth, for this Model T Ford which I call my body is getting worse and worse, and my friends — even my grandchildren will recognize it and make mental note, “He is getting old & dottery.”

This jalopy of a body of mine is getting into tired condition. The steering gear is so worn and wobbly that I have to use a cane to keep it from running off the road.

The headlights are so dim that I need magnifying lenses in front of them. The horn is a mere squawk compared to my youth.

And as for climbing hills, the less said the better. It is clear that this jalopy of a body of mine is going to have to be junked one of these days.

Ah, but the real person who lives inside this jalopy of a body is a totally different story.

Inside this wearing-out frame, enthusiasm is high, hope is secure, God is real and his truth shines brightly. The companionship of Christ is constant through His Holy Spirit, and God holds out a hope

for a new model after this present jalopy is junked.

Despite my personal battles with degenerative bone disease, fibro-myalgia, carpel-tunnel syndrome, Ankylosing spondylitis, sciatic neuralgia, almost five years from the years 2000 to 2005 in a wheelchair with a crushed spinal cord, and in the 1980s a highly malignant brain tumour, there is a hope burning within that is young and vibrant.

So, I am fine, thank you. How are you?

You, too, irrespective of your present circumstances, can have a mind and heart filled with a joyous hope.

There is a difference between happiness and joy — happiness depends upon what happens without, joy depends upon what or Whom is dwelling within.

You see, there are no hopeless situations, only people who think hopelessly. And it all begins in the heart and mind.

The inspirational writer Norman Vincent Peale wrote, Once [while] walking through the twisted little streets of Kowloon in Hong Kong, I came upon a tattoo studio.

In the window were displayed samples of the tattoos available. On the chest or arms you could have tattooed an anchor or flag or mermaid or whatever. But what struck me with force were three words that could be tattooed on one's flesh, *Born to lose*.

I entered the shop in astonishment and, pointing to those words, asked the Chinese tattoo artist, "Does anyone really have that terrible phrase, "Born to lose", tattooed on his body?"

He replied, "Yes, sometimes."

"But," I said, "I just can't believe that anyone in his right mind would do that."

The Chinese man simply tapped his forehead and said in broken English, "Before tattoo on body, tattoo on mind."

You see, hopelessness begins in the heart and mind.

I mentioned that I had been wheelchair-bound for almost five years. Some one asked me during that time what it was like living with a handicap. Here is how I truthfully answered the enquirer.

“Many decades ago when I was a child at primary school, I would rather read than participate in sporting activities. However at the school’s annual sports carnival, running races were mandatory for all students.

My teacher, a Miss Pierre, realised that I would be unlikely to run competitively against my classmates who spent every opportunity at recess and lunchtime to run and play in the school playgrounds while I sat and read books.

So Miss Pierre took me to one side and said, ‘Lionel, today for your race I am giving you a handicap.’

‘What’s that?’, I asked.

‘It’s a head start! When I start the race I will tell you to go first and then I will blow the whistle for the rest of the class to start running.’

Well, I still came in last in the race, but I have always remembered that to have a handicap is to have a head start.”

Hope also begins in the heart and mind.

Romans 15:13, “Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost”.

It is said that two kinds of birds fly over the California deserts: the hummingbird and the vulture.

All the vulture can see is rotting meat because that is all he looks for. He thrives on that diet. But the hummingbird ignores the carcasses and the smelly flesh of dead animals.

Instead, he looks for the tiny blossoms of the cactus flowers. He buzzes around until he finds the colourful blooms almost hidden from view by the rocks. Each bird finds what it is looking for.

What are you looking for? Better still—what are you finding? What you are finding tells what you are really looking for. Your expectations of life will determine your outcome.

A small boy asked his playmate, “Wouldn’t you hate to wear glasses all the time?”

“No-o-o,” the other boy answered slowly, “not if I had the kind grandma wears. She sees how to fix

a lot of things, and she sees lots of nice things to do on rainy days, and she sees when folks are tired and sorry, and what will make them feel better, and she always sees what you meant to do even if you haven't got things just right."

"I asked her one day how she could see that way all the time, and she said it was the way she learned to look at things as she grew older. So it must be her glasses."

What sort of glasses are you wearing? There's no danger of developing eyestrain from looking for the bright side of life.

Abraham Lincoln said that 'Most people are about as happy as they make up their minds to be.'

Author Robert C. Shannon tells of a man who once found a five-dollar bill. After that he always looked down when he walked along the street.

Over the course of the years, he found twelve hair-pins, five paper clips, a ballpoint pen, one 20c piece and, four 10c pieces, loads of aluminium cans and a very large assortment of supermarket discount vouchers.

But during those years he never saw a flower, a tree, or the smile of a passing stranger.

If we just look down at our problems, we will never rise above them.

We will be like the centipede in the parable who was doing fine until someone asked him which of his one hundred legs came after which. He'd never thought of that before. The more he thought about it, the more he couldn't remember, and eventually he found he couldn't walk at all.

So look forward in hope.

Someone gave me a smile today. I tried my best to give it away to everyone I chanced to meet as I was going along the street. But everyone that I could see would give my smile right back to me. When I got home, besides my smile, I had some more to last a while.

Like one candle lighting another, we lose none of our hope when we give hope to others.

In 1939, King George VI of England addressed the British Commonwealth on New Year's Eve at a moment in history when the whole world stood on

the brink of uncertainty. Despondency and uncertainty filled the air. The king's own body was racked by cancer.

Before that year was over, his life ended. Unaware of his own physical maladies, he uttered these memorable words adapted from Minnie Louise Haskins' poem "God Knows": I said to the man who stood at the Gate of the Year, "Give me a light that I might go safely out into the darkness."

And he replied, "Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the Hand of God. That shall be more to you than a light, and safer than a known way."

Psalms 71:14-15, "But I will hope continually, and will yet praise thee more and more. My mouth shall show forth thy righteousness and thy salvation all the day; for I know not the numbers thereof".

In 1834, Edward Mote wrote:

My hope is built on nothing less than
Jesus' blood and righteousness. I dare not
trust the sweetest frame,
but wholly lean on Jesus' name.

When darkness veils His lovely face, I rest on His unchanging grace. In every high and stormy gale, my anchor holds within the veil.

His oath, his covenant, his blood supports me in the whelming flood. When all around my soul gives way, he then is all my hope and stay.

When He shall come with trumpet sound, O may I then in Him be found! Dressed in His righteousness alone, faultless to stand before the throne.

On Christ the solid rock I stand; all other ground is sinking sand, all other ground is sinking sand.

A Prayer

for You to Pray:

Today we seek to be filled with your promise of hope so that we may share with others the joy and peace that hope from you can bring.

Thank you for this gift of hope.

In Jesus precious name, Amen.

Chapter 4: Hope in God

Psalm 42:5, “Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? HOPE IN GOD; for I shall again praise him, my help” (NRSV, emphasis added).

Hope in God! That’s the message of this chapter.

Psalm 30, “ Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice: let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications. If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared. I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope. My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning. Let Israel hope in the Lord: for with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption. And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities.”

Richard Sibbes, one of the great old Puritan preachers of Cambridge who died in 1635, wrote a

175 page book solely on Psalm 42:5. Sibbes was called ‘the sweet dropper’ because of how much confidence and joy his sermons caused.

He called his book ‘The Soul’s Conflict with Itself’, because in Psalm 42:5 that is exactly what you have, the self arguing with itself, proclaiming to itself. *“Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God”*.

Hoping in God does not come naturally for sinners like us. We must often tell it to ourselves, and do so diligently and forcefully, or we will give way to a downcast and disquieted spirit.

The best sermon I can ever preach, the best message that you can remember and the best gift that you can declare to yourself may be only three words long: *Hope in God.*

We can learn much from the way that the psalmists wrestle and fight and struggle to maintain their hope in God.

This is a normal Christian experience as we are still nothing more than saved sinners.

And we need to own up to it, or else we may

grow sluggish and negligent in our fight for hope. And that is very dangerous, as our text plainly teaches.

The intended biblical pattern of Psalm 42 provides what the author John Piper calls an 'Emotional Reservoir of Hope'.

Hope is like a reservoir or an artesian well of emotional strength.

If we are put down, we look to this emotional reservoir of hope for the strength to return good for evil. Without hope, we have no power to absorb the wrong and walk in love, and we may well sink into self-pity or self-justification.

If we experience a setback in our planning perhaps through getting sick, or when things don't go the way we'd hoped, we can dip into our emotional reservoir of hope for the strength to keep going and not give up.

If we face a temptation to be dishonest, to steal, to lie, or to lust, we need only drink of the emotional reservoir of hope for the strength to hold fast to the way of righteousness, and deny ourselves some brief, unsatisfying pleasure.

Having an emotional reservoir of hope is the way to fight for holiness in the Christian life. This is the biblical way to make our calling and election sure.

Arden K. Barden wrote, “It is not the way [that] we deal with our human situation that is the basis for hope. Hope is the basis for how we deal with our human situation”.

My prayer is that as we focus our attention on Christian hope, that God will fill our inner being to overflowing, and that deep down in the Snowy-Mountain reservoir of our soul the great hydro-electric generators of joy and love and boldness and endurance will stir up new power for the glory of God.

Another Psalm: This time, the first seven verses of Psalm 78.

Psalm 78:1, “Give ear, O my people, to my law: incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old: which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, showing to the generation to come the praises of the Lord, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done.”

"For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children: That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children: That they might SET THEIR HOPE IN GOD, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments". (Emphasis added)

What is Hope?

The most basic question of all is, 'What is hope?'

Specifically, we want to know not just a dictionary definition, but the biblical definition. We have to know what we are talking about before we can get very far in our grasp of the great truths about biblical hope.

We use the word hope in at least three different ways.

Hope is the desire for something good in the future. The children might say, "I hope daddy gets home early tonight so we can play a game after dinner

before his meeting." In other words, they desire for him to get home early so that they can experience this good thing, namely, playing together after dinner.

Secondly, hope is the reason why our hope might indeed come to pass. We say, "A good budget is our only hope of achieving our goal." In other words, the budget is the reason we may, in fact, achieve the future good that we desire. It's our only hope.

And thirdly, hope has an object in the future that we desire. We say, "Our hope is that we will arrive safely." In other words, our safe arrival is the object of our hope.

So hope is used to describe a desire for something good in the future, the basis or reason for thinking that our desire may indeed be fulfilled and the object in the future that we desire.

All three of these uses are found in the Bible. But the most important feature of biblical hope is not present in any of these ordinary uses of the word hope. In fact, the distinctive meaning of hope in Scripture is almost the opposite to our ordinary usage.

Not that hope is a desire for something bad instead of something good; or that in Scripture hope is a rejection of good instead of desire for it. It is not the opposite in those ways. It is the opposite because, ordinarily, when we use the word hope, we express uncertainty rather than conviction.

"I hope daddy gets home early," means, "I don't have any certainty that daddy will get home on time, I only desire that he does."

"A good budget is our only hope of achieving our goal," means, "A good budget would bring us to our desired goal, but in today's economic climate we can't be sure we will have one."

"Our hope is that we will arrive safely," means, "We don't know if we will or not, but that is what we want".

So ordinarily, when we express hope, we are expressing uncertainty. But this is not the distinctive biblical meaning of hope.

And the main thing I want to show from Scripture is that biblical hope is not just a desire for something good in the future, but rather, biblical hope

is a confident expectation and earnest craving for something good in the future.

Samuel Johnson wrote that the natural flights of the human mind are not from pleasure to pleasure but from hope to hope.

Biblical hope not only desires something good for the future — it expects it to happen. And it not only expects it to happen — it is confident that it will happen. There is an adamant certainty that the good we expect and desire will be done.

Titus 2:13, “Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ”.

The Greek word used here is the word ‘elpece’ meaning not just expectation, faith and hope but also confidence and certainty. So the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, the Second Coming if you will, is an absolute blessed certainty.

When we ask what the Blessed Hope is it is more than a desire for the Lord to come. It is, in fact the hope of eternal life. This is explained elsewhere

in the same epistle to Titus, initially in the first two verses: Titus 1:1, “Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God’s elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness; In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began”.

And then in Titus 3:7, “That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life”.

“Are you saved” is a question door-to-door witnesses or enthusiastic street evangelists will often ask. And we are sometimes reticent to say a resounding ‘yes’, fearing that we may fall into presumption or maybe identify with the Calvinistic clichés of ‘Once Saved Always Saved’ and the ‘Impossibility of Apostasy’.

We can say that we are saved in the context of what I call ‘‘Once Saved Always Being Saved’, and Scripture backs this up.

Nowhere does Scripture say that our freedom of choice is taken away when we choose God. In fact, in 1 Corinthians 10:12, Paul warns: “Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.”

The Christian who becomes so self-assured that he could never fall away is just the one, Paul says, who is most likely to fall away.

In Hebrews 3:12 the Bible warns: “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.” The book of Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians who were considering returning to their former religion because of the persecution they were enduring since their conversion.

This passage is referring to Christians, as it speaks of them as ‘brethren.’ What sin were they committing? Well, they are warned against having an ‘evil heart of unbelief.’ If they become unbelievers, what will their status be as far as God is concerned? They will have ‘departed from the living God.’

Can someone depart from or turn their back on God and still be saved? Only if they respond to his wooing and return. And because we all continually fall short of God’s ideal for us, I call this ‘Always Being Saved’. John 3:16 is a promise that whosoever believeth in God’s only begotten Son should not perish, but [shall] have everlasting life.

In 1989 as *glasnost* and *perestroika* were changing the map of Europe, a poll taken in the Soviet Union showed that fifty-seven percent of the adults surveyed said they had no confidence in the future.

Of course the poll had to do with the immediate future and with material things such as food, fuel and medicine.

If we were to ask the people in any country to answer spiritually, not materially, and long-term, not short-term, very few would say they have confidence in the future.

Biblical hope not only desires something good for the future, it actually expects it to happen.

We can have an *adamant* certainty that we can, we are and we will be saved.

Let me explain what I mean by a ‘adamant certainty’. Nowadays we use the word adamant to refer to someone who is especially stubborn. In ancient literature, adamant was a mythical mineral so hard as to be indestructible.

Adamant was the only substance hard enough to harm the Greek gods. In Roman mythology, the

underworld was sealed with columns of solid adamant.

Adamantine chains are the only bonds strong enough to imprison Satan in John Milton's Paradise Lost.

Jonathan Swift, in Gulliver's Travels, gives it as the element supporting the machinery that makes flight possible for his fictional island of Laputa.

According to the educator Loren Seibold, adamant shows up in modern fiction, such as in J R R Tolkien's 'Lord of the Rings' trilogy and Captain Marvel Comics.

Though adamant is a mythical substance, it makes a good metaphor for the kind of hope that we Christians seek.

God's promises are sure and indestructible; it isn't always easy, though, to incorporate them into our lives as living truths by which to live our lives with courage and certainty.

'Adamant certainty' differs from that of optimism or natural hope. Benjamin Franklin said, "He that lives upon hope will die fasting."

Of that natural hope, Omar Khayyam said, “It is like snow in the desert.”

An anonymous writer said that natural hope is a “quivering, nervous creature trying to be bright and cheerful but, alas, frequently sick abed with nervous prostration and heart failure.”

‘Adamant certainty’ also differs from a mathematical certainty. Mathematical certainty results from the principles of non-moral laws. If we have two apples and add two more, we may then be ‘mathematically’ certain that we now have four apples. We call that a mathematical certainty.

‘Adamant certainty’ even differs from logical certainty. Logical certainty also results from the ideologies of non-moral laws. Think of some great hero or film actor. If all men are mortal and if this character is a man, then we may be logically certain that this person also is mortal. That is what we call logical certainty.

Natural hope and mathematical and logical certainty is important. In fact, these ways of thinking are indispensable in biblical studies as well as all other areas of life. But much of our experience is not like

that. There is a kind of legitimate certainty and confidence that does not come from mathematical calculations or logical laws. I call it ‘adamant certainty.’

Adamant certainty is rooted in the commitment of the free will of individuals. And the will is the seat of adamant morality. That is, we can only speak of adamant moral right and wrong in relationship to acts of will. So whatever has to do with the will is an issue of adamant morality. And adamant moral certainty is a certainty that is based on acts of will.

For example, my marriage is strong and secure because of the adamant certainty that my wife Rosemary and I are going to stay married to each other as long as we live. This is based not on mathematical or statistical laws, or logical and deductive reasoning. Statistics suggest that around half of all marriages will end in divorce.

This adamant certainty is based on the disposition of our wills and the promises of God that form the expressions of our understanding of God’s will.

We believe that we were brought together

through certain acts of God and we have over forty years of married evidence of the nature and commitments of our wills and the graciousness and blessings of God.

When we speak of our future, we do not speak in the ordinary terms of hope. We don't say, for example, "We hope that we don't get divorced." We speak in terms of confidence and certainty, because the character of a God-centred will is like hardened steel. Hebrews 6:19 calls this type of hope an anchor of the soul.

Some people see education as civilization's anchor, but it was perhaps the best educated nation on earth that gave birth to the Nazi Party.

Some see health or work ethic as an anchor for life, but much of the work in the world is being done by people who don't feel like doing it.

Some see stability in wealth as their anchor.

However, they may have an experience similar to that of the ship Marine Electric, which sank off the coast of Virginia early in 1983, costing the lives of thirty-one sailors.

The reason was that the ship's eight-ton anchor came loose and battered the hull of the ship until the ship went down. The vessel was destroyed by its own anchor.

If any of these other things are your anchor, it may well destroy you. Our hope in Christ is the only unfailing anchor for the soul.

There is a kind of certainty that comes from knowing the character of our spouses. It is not infallible, but it is secure and confident.

It lets us sleep at night. It carries us over rough times. Eventually this type of hope will see us right up to and even through the grave.

A mother, the instant that she knows she is with child, lives her every moment in anticipation of her deliverance from the burden that is within her. After a time she cannot take a step, make a move, think a thought that is disassociated from the coming of her child.

In our country, courtesy dictates that we are supposed to ignore the obvious fact that a woman is with child. In France the case is quite the contrary. If

a man is introduced to a woman who is an expectant mother, it is the height of politeness for him to congratulate her.

My translation of a very common phrase used in France among the cultured is *"I congratulate you on your hope"*.

A woman in a convalescent home was given a party to celebrate her one-hundredth birthday. Her pastor came to offer his congratulations.

Later, the pastor said, "Her mind was keenly alert. When I arrived, she was completely caught up in the excitement of the birthday party.

A reporter had come to interview her. And when he asked that high-spirited, one-hundred-year-old woman, 'Do you have any children?' she replied, without hesitation, 'Not yet!'"

Just as a woman who desires a child becomes pregnant in anticipation of bearing a child, so a believer becomes saved in anticipation of being fully like the Lord Jesus Christ. It is unto this state of hope that we are saved.

Biblical hope is not a mere desire for something

good to happen. There is no such thing as a ‘slight touch of pregnancy’. Biblical hope is a confident expectation and desire for something good in the future.

Biblical hope has adamant certainty in it. When Scripture says, “Hope in God!” it does not mean, “Cross your fingers and hope for the best.” It means, to use the words of William Carey, “Expect great things from God.”

James S. Hewett writes, “An examination was being held in little Emma’s class at school and the question was asked: “Upon what do hibernating animals subsist during the winter?”

Emma thought for a few minutes and then wrote: “All winter long, hibernating animals subsist on the hope of a coming spring!”

Whenever faith in God looks to the future, it can be called hope. And whenever hope rests on the word of God, it can be called faith. Jurgen Moltmann wrote, “It is through faith that man finds the path of true life, but it is only hope that keeps him on that path”.

Now let us go to the Scripture to obtain an understanding of biblical hope: Hebrews 6:9–12."But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak. For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have showed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister. And we desire that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end: That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises."

After warning his readers that it is possible for people who have had remarkable religious experiences to commit apostasy and go beyond the point of no return, the author of Hebrews says, "Though we speak thus, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things that belong to salvation.""

The reason the writer is so sure that his readers will not be among the apostates is that they have not only been loving servants for God's sake in the past but are still serving. You see that emphasis on perseverance, don't you, at the end of verse 10? "You showed love in serving the saints in the past, and you still do."

Their religious experience was not a temporary decision at a Billy Graham crusade (no disrespect intended). It was continuing. Perseverance in godliness is the proof of the genuineness of a person's salvation.

That's why the writer feels so sure of the people: they had served the saints, and they still do. Vern McLellan wrote, "Never live in hope and expectation with your arms folded".

Now comes the admonition in verses 11 and 12 to press on and not become sluggish. But now the battle is described in terms of hope, not just in terms of love and service.

Romans 15:4, "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope".

A Prayer

for You to Pray:

"Thank You Lord that in and through
You we can have the blessed certainty
of an confident and joyous hope.

Fill us now with this assurance.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Chapter 5: Christmas Hope

Frederick Buechner's little book of character sketches of people from the Bible has this to say about the angel Gabriel as he encounters Mary:

"She struck him as hardly old enough to have a child at all, let alone this child. But he had been entrusted with a message to give her, and he gave it."

"He told her what the child was to be named, who he was to be, and something about the mystery that was to come upon her. 'You mustn't be afraid, Mary,' he said."

"As he said it, he only hoped she wouldn't notice that beneath the great golden wings, he himself was trembling with fear to think that the whole future of Creation hung on the answer of a girl."

Luke 1:26-33, "And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And the angel came

in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women. And when she [Mary] saw him [the Angel], she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be. And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end."

There would be no hope if it weren't for God and His mercy towards man. We easily read the account of the angel Gabriel being sent by God to proclaim a life-changing message to this young girl named Mary.

However, we quickly forget the background. The culture was in a very dark and hopeless place.

All throughout the Old Testament God had raised up messengers called prophets who prophesied of the coming Messiah, the Anointed One, who would save His people.

There are hundreds of prophecies that pointed to the coming of Jesus proclaimed by prophets such as Isaiah and Micah. These prophecies were clear and powerful.

People at one point longed for the prophecies to be fulfilled. However, when things didn't happen according to their plan and time they turned to their own devices.

When man is consumed with self, God is silent. For over four hundred years God did not raise up another prophet. They had man-made prophets and leaders, but they didn't have a prophet of God. So, God remained silent for over four hundred years. Do you like waiting for something?

No wonder Isaiah prophesied that the people would be in darkness. They were in desperate need of God's deliverance and help. And there at the height of man's greatest need God intervened in an amazing way.

God's plan for man's salvation and deliverance first came in a powerful announcement of hope. Although this message of hope was spoken personally to Mary, the message brings hope to all of us. It is a

message of hope for all the world.

Mary's hope wasn't simply a mustered up emotion. Many times we will hear people say, "You've got to have faith and hope for the best". They speak of it as if it is some 'hope-so' confidence that everything will work out in the end.

But, Mary's hope was based upon God's Word. The angel's appearance would have certainly gotten her attention, so much so that the angel said, "Don't be afraid."

But more than just the encounter, the message would have certainly gotten her attention. The angel announced, "The Lord is with you. You have found favour with God."

Luke 1:29 (again), "And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be".

And verse 34: "Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?"

There is an attack against hope in these verses. Those who have no hope live their life in defeat, discouragement, and deception. It is exactly how

Satan wants you to live your life. He doesn't want you to experience hope. He doesn't want you to trust God and have confident expectation for God to fulfil His word.

There are many things that hinder us from experiencing hope in the Lord. In this passage of Scripture we see that clearly. I don't think any of us can fully grasp the whole scene because we haven't had the same encounter with an angel.

From the moment Gabriel addressed her as the favoured one, she was perplexed or confused. She didn't understand why the angel addressed her in this way. She wasn't a prophet.

She had heard of the prophets of old and had likely heard many of the prophecies, but there was no reason for her to expect to hear a word from God.

Not only that, but she seemed to be the most unlikely candidate. Why would God choose her of all the people on the earth? Why would He refer to her as the favoured one? And to know that God was with her, that was amazing.

For 400 years God had been distant. Why

should she believe it? At the moment there was little reason to have confidence in the message. By sight it just didn't make sense.

She asked literally, "How can this be since I am a virgin?" We don't know her age, but we do know that she had never known a man intimately. She was engaged to be married but the two had not come together yet. Isaiah prophesied that she would be a virgin; Mary admitted that she was a virgin, and Joseph her fiancé was also completely convinced of her virginity.

Her question is logical. It is understandable. But in the moment it is her uncertainty and confusion that is hindering her from experiencing hope. She was having a 'But God said' moment.

Luke 1:35-37, "And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. For with God nothing shall be impossible".

I am thankful that God is patient with us. He was certainly patient with Mary. Young Mary asked an honest question and the angel gave an honest answer.

There are three components to God's promise in this answer: They are God's plan, God's Proof, and God's power.

God's Plan

God is not a God of chaos. He is strategic and orderly. So, the angel of the Lord begins answering Mary's question by telling her the plan. He begins by telling her how the child would be conceived.

Luke 1:35 says that the conception of the Christ child would not take place how and where conception normally does among women. In fact this would be a miracle of God and would show His power over nature.

We know that this was a miracle because of a tiny factor that Mary overlooked, but the physician, Dr Luke, with his medical eye for detail was specific in recording.

Dr Luke tells us that the angel said that Mary would conceive in the womb or uterus, not in the tubes of reproduction that we now know as fallopian tubes, which is where conception takes place.

In Luke 1:31 the angels said, "… behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS."

Then in Luke 2:21 the good doctor Luke repeats his awareness of this strange place for conception to occur when he says, "…when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called JESUS, which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb."

Since the time of Job as recorded in Job 31:15 it was known that the womb was not for conception but for the continued growth and development of a person.

The wisest man in earth's history of, Solomon recognised this as recorded in Ecclesiastes 11:5 – "As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all".

Even in the modern science of Invitro-fertilization conception doesn't take place in the womb, but prior to implantation.

If God made these bodies of ours and knows every hair on our head, then surely He can do with our bodies what He desires. So, the angel told Mary that the Holy Ghost would come upon her and the power of God would overshadow her.

The text says nothing of sexual intimacy nor suggests anything differently. Instead, it says that the power God would overshadow her and the child would be conceived. As a result, the child that would be born of her would be called the Son of God.

So this child would not be of the seed of man, but of the seed of God. We don't know all of the details but, as I have said, we do know that the conception was a miracle.

Some have suggested that this isn't too important. That even if Jesus was conceived naturally then He would still be Jesus. But we must understand that removing the virgin birth would mean that prophecies concerning Him were untrue.

Jesus' birth was miraculous because He was the Son of God, He was miraculously conceived, and was born as God in flesh.

Jesus would be born of a human mother which means that Jesus was 100% man yet 100% God. And because He was God, even though He was in the flesh of man, He thought no sin, did no sin, and had no sin. He was God in flesh.

God's Proof

So the first component of the promise was God's plan. The second component of the promise was God's proof. Not that proof was needed, but to prove that his Word was true Gabriel told Mary that her cousin Elizabeth was also pregnant.

In fact, at that moment she was six months pregnant. This was an amazing thing. Given her age and that she had been barren up to this point this was truly a miracle. In fact, the baby in Elizabeth's womb also had a unique and divine purpose.

Upon hearing the news, Mary would've immediately rejoiced. In that culture the number of children you had often was perceived to be a

measuring rod of God's blessings. To have had no children for many would've been a sign of shame.

I wonder how many times Elizabeth had asked God for a baby. I wonder how often Mary and the other family members encouraged her and prayed with her that God would bless her with a child.

Elizabeth was now at an age where it would seem impossible to be pregnant, but Gabriel's announcement was proof that God could do anything.

The point was that if God could make a barren womb spring to life, then He could certainly make a virgin's womb spring to life.

What difference would there be to a God who had Himself created the whole wonderful process of conception and birth? The Bible continually shows us that He is the One who can open and close the womb.

Praise God for the proofs that He often brings to remind us of His working in our lives. How has God proven Himself to you?

What things has He done in your life to remind you that He is capable of anything?

We may not always see it and we may not always understand it, but if we are watching for His work, often times like a marker ribbon on a trail, He reveals to us glimpses and pieces for us to see where He is at work, which gives to us peace, knowing that we are on the right path. Praise the Lord for the proof He reveals in our life.

God's Power

We've looked at God's plan and God's proof. The third component of the promise was God's power.

The next thing that we see is a word of encouragement to Mary. Gabriel said, "For nothing will be impossible with God."

He was reminding her that the God she worshipped was not 'a' god but 'the' God. He has all power and authority to do according to His will.

The 1901 American Standard Version translates this verse, "For no word from God shall be void of power." The point is that God accomplishes His purposes through the power of His Word.

May we never forget that God has all power.

Sometimes we get discouraged with our lives. We hear the bad news of disease or illness, but, should He choose, God has power to remove it. When we look at seemingly hopeless situations and give in to discouragement and fear, it is because we have forgotten or not believed that God has all power.

If we look at our past, those wasted years of our lives not living for the Lord, we may wonder if there is any hope for our future. But God has the power to take us, clean us, and use those very experiences to be used for His glory.

Many a person has realized their sinful state and their need for a Saviour and has questioned, “Is it possible to be forgiven? Is it possible to start over? Is it possible to have peace in my life? Is it possible to have hope?”

And the overwhelming answer of Scripture is that with God all things are possible.

Luke 1:38-50, “And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her. And Mary arose in those days, and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Juda; And entered into the

house of Zacharias, and saluted Elisabeth. And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost:"

"And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord."

"And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name. And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation".

Some might argue the point that "hope" isn't an action, but more of an emotion or a state of being.

However, I would suggest that when a person has "hope" it is seen by his or her actions. The person

who hopes to recover from an illness acts by getting sleep, changing their diet, or taking medication. The person who hopes their sports team will win the game tunes the Television or radio to watch or listen, they cheer, they support and sometimes spend exorbitant amounts of money to watch a match in person or wear team colours.

Their hope leads them to action. Such was the case with Mary and such is the case with us when we respond to God's Word.

Note the progression. The angel addresses Mary as the favoured one and Mary is perplexed at why she would be addressed in this way. The angel announces the conception of the Saviour and declares God's power and reign. Mary is confused and asks how this can be. The angel then explain how God is going to work a miracle, he gives a close illustration, and explains that absolutely nothing is impossible with God.

Surrender

Mary is now at a significant moment. She is in a moment of decision. She is at a crisis of belief. If she receives and believes there will be consequences,

but there will also be overwhelming hope and joy. If she rejects, her life will go on sort-of as normal, but she would never know the hope and joy that were available to her.

Notice clearly how Mary responded. The action of hope for Mary was both surrender and celebration.

The Bible says that she surrendered herself to the Lord as a willing servant. In other words, she believed the word of the Lord and humbled herself to His will. In fact, she called herself a “bond-slave” or “handmaid”, which was the lowest kind of female servant in that day.

This shows her humility. She felt so unworthy of this amazing privilege, but her trust and confidence was in the God.

She likely didn’t know all the changes this would bring to her life. She couldn’t have known all the long stares that she would receive from other people.

She probably didn’t grasp how this might affect Joseph and her close family. All she knew was that

God had spoken. He was leading her and she trusted Him and willingly submitted to His will.

What a powerful example for each of us to follow. I'm sure if it had been you or me in that situation we might have hesitated or at least reconsidered.

She could well have had some real issues with what Gabriel was saying to her.

She would have to soon face the criticism and mockery of her neighbours, the outrage of her family, and even doubt from the man who desired to marry her.

And what about the local rabbi and the other authorities? To have a child out of wedlock was a very serious matter, not to mention the personal scrutiny she would face.

But that didn't matter to Mary. She heard, she believed, and she surrendered herself completely to the Lord's will. I

must ask you , "Have you heard the Lord's Word speaking or sensed his power coming out from the pages of Holy Writ, have you believed, have your

surrendered yourself to the Lord?”

The first action of hope is that we surrender to the Lord.

Celebration

And then came the second action of hope: celebration.

There is only one person that can bring absolute abundant joy to your life and that is Jesus. Even as Jesus was just a babe in the womb His very presence brought joy to those who were around. Can you imagine the sight as Mary went to Judah and entered Zacharias and Elizabeth’s house?

As Mary entered the house she greeted Elizabeth. Immediately the unborn baby, John the Baptist, now 6 months into gestation, leaped for joy within her womb. The baby leaped for joy.

Many years ago I worked in a rural hospital maternity ward and personally delivered no less than six babies during my short time there. There were many times that I saw or felt an unborn baby kick or observed an elbow or knee move a pattern across the

mother's abdomen. But, I've never seen a baby in the womb leap, at least, not for joy. But, that is exactly what happened when unborn baby John was brought into the presence of unborn baby Jesus.

But that wasn't the only expression of joy. When the Bible says that Elizabeth cried out with a loud voice, in the original language it means that she sang. She sang a song of praise about the Lord. It was the first Christmas song. It wasn't fancy but it was clear. As she sang, she encouraged Mary. Mary would be 'blessed' among women, not above women but among women.

The Greek word translated 'among' is '*en*'. In Luke 6: 40 the good Doctor Luke uses a different word (*hooper*) when he wants use the word 'above'. Luke 6: 40 says, "The disciple is not 'above' his master…".

So Mary would be blessed 'among' women. In other words she would become a mother, one of the greatest miracles and blessings that God can bestow upon a woman.

Psalms 127:3 says, "Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord: and the fruit of the womb is a

reward" The Hebrew word for 'reward' is *saw-kaw* which can also be translated, 'blessing'.

Mary needed this encouragement because she would only be there for about three months and then go back home. By the time she returned her pregnancy would be showing and the ridicule and long looks would begin.

So, she was given confirmation before she returned home. But the song also exalted Jesus.

Elizabeth asks in verse 43, "How has it happened to me, that the mother of my Lord would come to me?" Don't miss this. In the song she declared her belief that the child in Mary's womb was indeed the Lord Jesus, *Immanuel* (God with us).

When Elizabeth finished her song, Mary immediately burst into song. This may seem strange to us in our culture, but for them there could've been no higher form of joy and celebration. This was a God-filled moment of overflowing joy.

The first thing she rejoices in, is that the Lord is her Saviour. What a powerful truth of Scripture this is. All mankind is in need of a Saviour. We have

all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23) so we need One who will rescue us and save us.

Some would have us believe that Mary had never sinned, but she tells us that she needed a Saviour too.

Mary took great comfort in knowing that God had showed mercy to her. But we can be encouraged to know that He wasn't merciful only to her. He is merciful to us today. Notice verse 50, "His mercy is upon generation after generation toward those who fear Him."

We don't have to live our life overwhelmed with defeat, discouragement and depression. We can live our life with great hope. We see this in Mary. The child was not yet born, but she had hope — a confident, joyful expectation that God would accomplish in her life what He set out to do.

She was willing to trust Him and follow Him knowing that His will and His ways are always best.

What about you and me? Do we need hope? It comes first by believing God and taking Him at His

Word.

True story: A missionary returned to the little village that had been destroyed by the enemies of the gospel. He found the people weeping over the ashes that were previously their thatched roofs. One of the natives said to him, “They even burned my Bible and my hymnbook!”

And then in the ruins he saw a little sheet of smudgy white paper not totally burned. He picked it up and read it. It was a fragment of his hymnbook. The only thing that remained was “Joy to the world, the Lord is come.” He stopped for a moment and then he said, “That’s enough for me.”

Although we often sing it at Christmas, the 1719 carol by Isaac Watts, “Joy to the World” was not originally written about Christ’s birth but to celebrate His return to reign on the earth, reminding us that victory and hope are only found in Jesus.

The words are based on Psalm 98: 4-9, “Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all the earth: make a loud noise, and rejoice, and sing praise. Sing unto the Lord with the harp; with the harp, and the voice of a psalm. With trumpets and sound of cornet make

a joyful noise before the Lord, the King. Let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein. Let the floods clap their hands: let the hills be joyful together Before the Lord; for he cometh to judge the earth: with righteousness shall he judge the world, and the people with equity."

Contemplate these lyrics:

"Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Let earth receive her King; let every heart prepare Him room, and heaven and nature sing, and heaven and nature sing, and heaven, and heaven and nature sing."

"Joy to the earth, the Saviour reigns! Let men their songs employ; while fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains, repeat the sounding joy, repeat the sounding joy, repeat, repeat the sounding joy."

"No more let sin and sorrow grow, nor thorns infest the ground. He comes to make His blessings flow, far as the curse is found, far as the curse is found, far as, far as the curse is found".

A Prayer

for You to Pray:

God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) fill our hearts with joy and peace; let us each, thy love possessing, triumph in redeeming grace.

O refresh us, travelling through this wilderness.

Thanks we give and adoration for thy gospel's joyful sound.

May the fruits of salvation, in our hearts and lives abound; ever faithful to the truth may we be found.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Chapter 6: The Blessed Hope

Psalm 119:1, “Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord”.

Verses 26 and 27, “I have declared my ways, and thou heardest me: teach me thy statutes. Make me to understand the way of thy precepts: so shall I talk of thy wondrous works”.

Verses 42-48, “So shall I have wherewith to answer him that reproacheth me: for I trust in thy word. And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth; for I have hoped in thy judgments. So shall I keep thy law continually for ever and ever. And I will walk at liberty: for I seek thy precepts.”

“I will speak of thy testimonies also before kings, and will not be ashamed. And I will delight myself in thy commandments, which I have loved. My hands also will I lift up unto thy commandments, which I have loved; and I will meditate in thy statutes”.

And verse 116, “Uphold me according unto

thy word, that I may live: and let me not be ashamed of my hope".

Titus 2:13-15, "Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. These things speak, and exhort…".

The Bible tells me, tells us all, to talk about the Blessed Hope.

Once upon a time, and far, far away, according to a Greek legend, there was a time on Earth when everything was new. Every living being was forever youthful, childlike in their existence. The gods were happy with Man and with all creation.

That is until two brothers, Prometheus and Epimetheus found a way to steal Fire, which at that point had only been reserved for the gods.

Enraged, the god Zeus carefully planned a way in which to amend the rift between god and man. Together with the other gods, they each contributed gifts into the making of a vessel that would be named

Woman, a companion for mankind.

She was given charm and graciousness, beauty and a songlike voice. The gods also gave her lies, treachery, lust and shamelessness.

This first woman was named Pandora, which means, “gifted one.” (Remember this is a Greek Legend)

As the gods prepared for her arrival upon Earth, the goddess Hera whispered curiosity into her ear. The god Zeus also presented her with a beautifully inlaid box with the specific instruction to keep it sealed.

Instantly Pandora stood at the door of Epimetheus, the more headstrong of the two brothers. Epimetheus immediately fell in love with Pandora and invited her to marry him, for surely the gods would be pleased.

Epimetheus inquired about Pandora’s wooden possession. Again, she repeated that it must remain sealed. Time passed, the two participated with the others in gathering figs and berries, playing and laughing with each other for the Earth was pure and

bountiful.

Despite Pandora's pleasant exterior, her curiosity pertaining to the box grew to a feverish pitch. One day her husband Epimetheus was gone for the afternoon. Perhaps Pandora's incessant obsession with the box had begun to annoy him and he sought solitude.

Pandora, at home alone, stared at the box - debating whether or not she should break the rule that was laid out to her and open it.

Eventually Pandora succumbed to her curiosity and stupidly began opening the box. With each panel sliding open, anxiety and uneasiness grew within her until the last panel slid open.

The legend tells us that the lid exploded open under great pressure knocking Pandora to the floor. Black winds and dust blew about, the sky darkened and the temperature fell from a pleasant warm to a frighteningly chilly atmosphere.

From the box emerged unhappiness, plague, loneliness, famine, heartbreak and all kinds of evil — filling the world with all that can hurt mankind.

Epimetheus returned empty handed because the food on the berry plants had spoiled as evil filled the earth, and he found Pandora weeping before the opened box.

Although angry, he still had the presence of mind to notice that there was still something left in the box. It was bright and very shiny and seemed to be asking to be set free.

What do you think was in the box according to the ancient Greek legend? – *Hope*.

What is Hope?

1 Timothy 1:1 tells us what it *is*: “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the commandment of God our Saviour; and Lord Jesus Christ, which is our hope.”

1 Timothy 2:8 tells us what it *is not*: “I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting.”

2 Timothy 1:1 tells us what it *is*: “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus.”

2 Timothy 2:8 tells us what it *is not*: Hope is not forgetting! 2 Timothy 2:8 says, “Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to the gospel.”

Titus 1:1 tells us what it *is*: “I Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God’s elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness” (acknowledging and grasping the truth)

Titus 2:8 tells us what it *is not*: Hope is not condemned - Titus 2:8 says, “Sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you.”

We started this chapter with Titus 2:13-15, that great ‘blessed hope’ passage that Paul wrote to Titus on the Greek island of Crete. Written between Paul’s first and second letters to Timothy towards the end of the great apostle Paul’s life. It has a sense of urgency about it. An urgency which says, Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.

In the beginning of the letter to Titus, Paul says

in verse 4, “To Titus, mine own son after the common faith: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour.”

This grace, mercy, and peace is an echo of 1 Corinthians 13:13, “And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity”.

Other passages in 1 Corinthians mirror Titus very closely.

Chapter 9 ---------> Faith,
Chapter 10 ---------> Hope,
and
Chapters 11-13 ---------> Charity
(grace, mercy, and peace)

In 1 Corinthians chapter 9 verse 7 Paul writes: “Who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges? who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof? or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock?”

And in verse 10 “Or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written: that he that ploweth should plow in hope; and that he

that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope."

In 1 Corinthians chapter 10 we see Paul's hope in Christ, "Moreover; brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; And did all eat the same spiritual meat; And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ."

And 1 Corinthians chapters 11-13 culminate with that well known and previously quoted statement in 1 Corinthians 13:13 which says, "And now abideth faith, hope, charity".

I have written anothers book to delve the depths of the subjects of charity (or love) and faith and hope*.

Hebrews 11:1 says, "Now faith is the substance of things HOPED for" (emphasis added). The focus in this book is on Hope.

(* These books available free from archive.org)

Colossians 1:5 says that our hope is laid up for us in heaven, so where do we get our hope?

Colossians 1:27, “To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”

So our hope is based on Jesus Christ. Life with Christ is an endless hope, Life without Christ has a hopeless end.

American writer Don Basham said, “Our hope lies, not in the man we put on the moon, but in the Man we put on the cross.”

Is hope something we can see? I would like to suggest that the answer is no. Rom 8:24- 26 reads, “For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it. Likewise the Spirit also helps us.”

In Proverbs it says that Hope deferred makes the heart sick. (proverbs 13:12) Have you ever heard the expression, coined by Cisero, “Where there’s life,

there's hope?"

The Bible says a similar thing but in quite a strange way. Ecclesiastes 9:4 says, "For to him that is joined to all the living, there is hope: for a living dog is better than a dead lion".

The New International Version translation says, "Anyone who is among the living has hope - even a live dog is better off than a dead lion."

An Arabian Proverb says, "He who has life has hope; and he who has hope has everything".

What about the expression, "The blessed hope" of Titus 2:13? Some would choose to suggest that the Blessed Hope the fact that Christ will come again?

My King James Version of the Holy Bible says in Titus 2:13, "Looking for that blessed hope, AND the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (emphasis added).

The original language reads *prosdechomai makarios elpis doxa epiphaneia mega theos.* Now for those who may not know their biblical Greek: *prosdechomai* (implies to confidently wait & look for something); *makarios* (means happy or blessed - we

find that word used in the beatitudes of Matthew 5); *elpis* (is our word for hope or expectation); *doxa* (we get the word doxology from this word and it means: worthy or glorious); *epiphaneia* (means a coming - or in this case more specifically the second coming); *mega* (now, you know what that means, it means: Great; and) *theos* (meaning God).

So the original can be translated to *Confidently look for and happily expect the glorious Second Coming of our great God.*

So when the Bible says that we "hope for the Second Coming" It means that we *expect* it to happen!

Now we get down to semantics. This may not seem important yet, but there is a huge difference between hoping in Jesus Christ's Second Coming and hoping in the FACT that He will come again.

Paul makes it quite clear in his letter to Titus that our blessed hope is not the fact that Jesus will return, but that we will be ready to meet him. In Titus 1:2 we read, "In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began".

And again in Titus 3:7, "That being justified

by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. For Paul Eternal Life was the Blessed Hope."

Paul said in Colossians 1:27 which we read earlier, "Christ in you is the hope of glory", another word picture of eternal life.

I pray to be like the Apostle because for Paul the fact that Christ will come again was not the Blessed Hope, but the Blessed Certainty!

Several years ago a teacher assigned to visit children in a large city hospital received a routine call requesting that she visit a particular child.

She took the boy's name and room number and was told by the teacher on the other end of the line, "We're studying nouns and adverbs in his class now. I'd be grateful if you could help him with his homework so he doesn't fall behind the others."

It wasn't until the visiting teacher got outside the boy's room that she realized it was located in the hospital's burn unit. No one had prepared her to find a young boy horribly burned and in great pain.

She felt that she couldn't just turn and walk

out, so she awkwardly stammered, “I’m the hospital teacher, and your teacher sent me to help you with nouns and adverbs.”

The next morning a nurse on the burn unit asked her, “What did you do to that boy?”

Before she could finish a profusion of apologies, the nurse interrupted her: “You don’t understand. We’ve been very worried about him, but ever since you were here yesterday, his whole attitude has changed. He’s fighting back, responding to treatment-.It’s as though he’s decided to live.”

The boy later explained that he had completely given up hope until he saw that teacher. It all changed when he came to a simple realisation. With joyful tears he expressed it this way: “They wouldn’t send a teacher to work on nouns and adverbs with a dying boy, would they?”

The 19th Century hymnist John R MacDuff wrote, *“With that blessed hope before us, let no harp remain unstrung; let the mighty advent chorus onward roll from tongue to tongue: Christ is coming! Christ is coming! Come, Lord Jesus, quickly come!”*

And to that we can all say, Amen.

A Prayer

for You to Pray:

May the peace of God enfold us, the love of God uphold us, the wisdom of God control us and the promises of God sustain us as we await the blessed hope and the glorious appearing of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Chapter 7: Hope and Heaven

Colossians 1:1-5, “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timotheus our brother, To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

“We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints, For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel;”

It was five days before Christmas. The man drove up and down the lanes of the crowded Target parking lot, looking for a place to park his car.

Once inside the store, he found the aisles jammed with shopping carts and last minute shoppers like himself.

As hurriedly as the packed store would allow, he grabbed the few gifts he had come to purchase

and steered his cart to the checkout lines, resigning himself to a long wait for his turn at the cash register.

In front of him were two small children, a boy of about 10 and his little sister. The boy wore a ragged coat and worn out tennis shoes that were enormously large for his small feet. In his grimy hands he clutched a small wad of dollar bills. The girl was dressed no better than her brother was. Her hair was a matted tangle of curls. Cradled in her arms was a pair of shiny gold house-slippers.

When it came their turn at the register, the little girl carefully placed the slippers on the counter. The clerk ran the barcode over the scanner and announced, "That will be $6.09." The boy stared at the crumpled bills in his hand. It wasn't enough. "I guess we'll have to put them back and come back some other time," he said.

The little girl choked back a sob. "But Jesus would have loved these shoes," she said.

"Don't cry," said her little brother. "We'll come back and get them later."

The man gave a couple of bills to the cashier.

“Here, I’ll make up the difference.” Almost immediately, he was wrapped in a pair of tiny arms and a small voice whispered, “Thank you, Sir.”

The man patted the matted head. His curiosity aroused, he asked, “What did you mean when you said that Jesus would like the slippers?”

The little boy answered for his sister. “Our mummy is sick. Dad said she might go to sleep before Christmas and wait for Jesus to take her to Heaven to be with Him.”

The girl added, “My Sunday School teacher said the streets in Heaven are shiny gold. Won’t my mommy be beautiful walking on those streets in these slippers?”

The man looked down into the tear-streaked face. “Yes, I’m sure she will.”

Praise the Lord for a Sunday School teacher who had something more to give a little girl than a piece of candy or a cute little story.

Thank the Lord that she could tell her about Heaven and Jesus coming again, and plant a seed of hope in this child.

Where will we be without a hope of Heaven? How can we face death — how can we really enjoy life — if we didn't have hope beyond the grave? Hope and Heaven go together. For the Christian, our hope is in Heaven.

It's the place where we will rest from all our labours.
It's the place where we will be freed from all our trials.
It's the place where we will be finally and completely healed of every sickness.
It's the place of gladness and life never-ending.
It's the place where we will forever be with our best friend Jesus.

That's what it means to have a hope of Heaven.

In Colossians 1:1-5, Paul thanked God continually that the believer's in Colosse had a hope laid up for them in Heaven. We have to understand what that meant to those people. We are accustomed to cemeteries. We put up tombstones engraved with words of hope.

But the pagan world in Colosse of that day knew little if anything of life beyond the grave. Death terrified them. There were no promises of peace and rest etched on Colossian grave markers.

Then they heard the Gospel — the story of One who conquered death, rose in victory over the grave, and offered a promise of life in Heaven to all who would trust Him.

Superstitions were abandoned and hope replaced fear when they placed their faith in Jesus to save them.

Hope and Heaven go together. They are the precious, exclusive possession of the Christian.

Let me share three biblical facts about Heaven.

Heaven is a Place

Firstly, Heaven is a PLACE

There are those that believe that Heaven is nothing more than a state of mind. Others say that Heaven is whatever goodness you can grab hold of in this life. But Heaven is a place. Let me give you three simple reasons why heaven is a place.

1. Jesus came from Heaven. John 6:38, “For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me.”

2. Jesus returned to Heaven. 1 Peter 3:22, “Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him.”

3. Jesus is coming again from Heaven. 1 Thessalonians 4:16, “For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:”

Every time the Bible mentions Heaven, it speaks of it as a real place. From Scripture alone we do not know where it is, except that the Bible always speaks of it as being “up.” Jesus came down from Heaven. He ascended up to Heaven. When He comes back for His church, we are going up to meet Him in the clouds.

Up there, somewhere on the celestial map of God, is a place called Heaven.

Heaven is Promised

So firstly, Heaven is a place. Secondly, Heaven is PROMISED to the Believer

When the Christian speaks of a “hope” of Heaven, he speaks of something sure, a certainty. He means that Heaven fills the longing of his heart because he expects to go there some day.

Often, when I am sharing the Gospel with others, I will ask them if they KNOW they are going to Heaven someday. I cannot tell you how many times I have received the answer, “Oh, I certainly hope so.”

They are not sure. They just “hope” that when they die, it will all somehow work out.

That’s not what Paul meant when he thanked God for a hope laid up for us in Heaven. He meant that we could look forward to Heaven with confidence because it has been promised us.

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 tells us that Jesus is coming for us, we are going to be caught up to meet Him in the air and then we will be with Him forever, in Heaven. That’s God’s promise.

In 1 Peter 1:3-5 Peter also links together the words hope and Heaven. And he tells us something more about God’s promise of Heaven. He calls it an inheritance. It comes to us at no cost to ourselves.

There is no down payment, real-estate agent's fees or closing costs. There are no mortgage payments, property taxes, or fear of foreclosure. It's God's free gift to the Believer.

He tells us that it is reserved for us in Heaven, and we are kept by the power of God for it. Heaven is promised, and it's God's own power that guarantees the promise will be fulfilled.

Heaven is being Prepared

I said that firstly, Heaven is a place. Secondly, Heaven is promised, and now thirdly, Heaven is being PREPARED for the Believer

John 14:1-3 tells of mansions in Heaven, and the architect and builder of them all is Jesus Christ. He is preparing them for us.

But what kind of place is God preparing. We really don't know. In fact, 2 Corinthians 2:9 says it is so wonderful that eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared [for us.]

But in the opening verses of Revelation 21we

are given a few tantalizing glimpses. It is a place where everything is new

1. *A new heaven* – a whole new universe of stars and galaxies

2. *A new earth* – pristine, fresh, unmarked by sin

3. *A new city* – with streets of gold, foundations of precious stones, and gates of pearl

4. *A new relationship* – God dwelling with men, no longer separated because of sin.

5. *A new condition* where every broken heart will be healed, death will be forbidden, sorrow will be unknown and suffering will be no more

Revelation 21:27 mentions one final fact about Heaven that I would like us to consider. It debunks the myth that good people go to Heaven and bad people go to Hell. It says, "And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie."

This verse disqualifies anyone from getting into Heaven by his or her goodness. No one is good

enough. But I didn't read all the verse. It goes on to say, "But they which are written in the Lamb's Book of Life."

God's has a book, and in it are recorded the names of everyone who has trusted Jesus Christ as their Saviour. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father but by me."

The door to Heaven is wide open, but the only way to enter is by putting our faith in Jesus Christ to save you.

Jesus is not *A* way, but *THE* way.

God took our sin debt and placed them on Jesus. He died in our place. And when we trust Him as our Saviour, God no longer looks upon us as a sinner. He writes our name in the Lamb's Book of Life and the Bible says that He forgets our sin.

You can get to Heaven from anywhere on earth, but there is only one way. We must believe in Jesus as our Saviour. Don't put off the decision to receive or re-commit to Christ. Trust Him today.

A Prayer

for You to Pray:

Thank You Lord you have promised a place that you are preparing for us.

May we so live our lives that we show our gratitude for this free gift.

Please instil in us a desire to tell others of this wonderful promise.

And now, in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we seek from You Your promised blessing. Amen.